



What is eternal life?

One of the assignments the confirmation students have this year is to come to class each week with one question they have about the Christian faith. Things like,

“Why do we...?”

“Why don’t we...?”

Why did Jesus...?”

What did Jesus mean by...?”

“What do we mean when we say...?”

“What does the Bible say about...?”

“How do we know...?”

The above question came from a confirmation student, and I told them, “Jesus actually defined it for us. And His answer is probably not what you’d think.”

The following is a quote from a prayer Jesus prayed right before He was arrested by the Jewish religious leaders the night before He was executed on the cross. The prayer is often referred to as Jesus’ “High Priestly” prayer. It takes up all of John chapter 17.

Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. John 17:1-3

For starters Jesus tells us that eternal life is something that He “gives.” It’s not something we acquire by working for it or deserving it. That part you probably knew.

We would expect Jesus to go on to define eternal life as a life that “lasts forever.” We tend to think of eternal life as a quantity of time that starts when we die or when Jesus returns on the last day.

We might have expected Him to add something about it being a life full of peace and joy and free of sin, hurt, and death. And all of those things are true aspects of eternal life that we find spoken of in the Bible. (See Revelation 21) But the way Jesus defined eternal life shows that when it comes to eternal life, the quality of that life is of greater importance than the quantity of time it lasts.

Jesus very simply defined “eternal life” as: Knowing God the Father and the Son (Jesus) that the Father sent into our world.

When the word “know” is used in the Bible, the meaning is much deeper than “knowing about” someone or knowing what they said or did. To “know” someone, as the Bible uses the word, is to have the closest of relationships with them. A close, loving, trusting relationship. Like good parents have with their children and vice versa.

Simply put, this means you possess eternal life from the moment you place your trust in Jesus (and

through Him, your trust in God the Father as well).

In practical terms that means you don't have to wait until you die to get eternal life! Plus, you can actually be assured that you have it. Listen to the Apostle John in 1 John 5:13

“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.”

When you “know” Jesus - have a relationship of trust in Him and love for Him - you can be assured that you possess eternal life - right now!

The Apostle Paul also does remind us that eternal life will actually get better after we die and we get to spend the rest of eternity in the visible presence of the Father and the Son: **“Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.”** 1 Corinthians 13:12

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net